



FOR THE JOY PART 1 | COMING KING, COMING SIGN

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In our modern consumer culture anticipation is king. Marketers rely on their ability to anticipate what it is the consumer desires, and from that platform build a product which meets those felt needs. To see how prevalent this theme is we only have to look at the phenomenon of "unboxing." Unboxing is a social media craze, typically with technology, where someone films the opening of their new box and gives a commentary on the look, the feel, and the experience of the long awaited product.

Today is Palm Sunday, where we remember Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. In one sense what we will read today is the "unboxing" of Jesus Christ. He has been billed as the long awaited King of the Jews, the prophet whom God long spoke of coming to restore men to God, to establish his perfect kingdom, and to displace those who posed a threat to his people. And what we will read today is the Jesus claims to be the son of God, who just raised a man from the dead, rolling into Jerusalem in the direct fulfillment of a longstanding prophecy, and yet the reviews of the cultural pundits are not that great. They assess their need, and judge him to be less than satisfactory. **John 12:12-19.**

The irony of Jesus' triumphal entry is that it was relatively nominal. He wasn't riding a war horse, he wasn't escorted by chariot, he had no eloquent herald. He rode a lowly donkey, with his only crowd being a peasant class of fan boys more driven by his miracles than anything else. And the religious power brokers realize this and their critique is relevant even for us today: **John 12:19.**

They are quick to analyze Jesus and make this declaration that those who follow him are gaining nothing. "The world has gone after him, but we who know truth can see the facade." It is the age old critique that religion is the opiate of the masses. Its power lies in its fanaticism, not its substance. The atheist Richard Dawkins puts it this way, **"One of the truly bad effects of religion is that it teaches us that it is a virtue to be satisfied with no understanding."**

Perhaps this is you today, wondering what the special substance is that makes people come to Jesus? Or maybe you are a Christian in here this morning, and while you understand that there might be a need for salvation in your life, you wonder what it is you really gain in Christ? Our Easter series this year set's to examine the joy we have in this gospel story of Jesus Christ. Just like all the characters in this text, we are all responding in various ways to Jesus Christ, and what this passage seeks to do today is to help us respond rightly to Jesus.

The Easter story is that a king has come, and we are held responsible for our thoughts towards him. But the gospel of the Easter story is that God has provided us a way, and an event, which enables us to understand properly the way in which we respond to Jesus in our own life. What we are going to see in the book of John today is that **Jesus makes sense of our longings for more by becoming something greater.**

And actually it is the critique of the Pharisees which reveals the wonderful beauty of Jesus Christ, because in one sense they couldn't be more wrong, but in another sense they couldn't be more right.

Much to their own surprise we see how right the religious officials were immediately after they offer their review of the coming King. **John 12:20-22.**

Now we need to remember the profession Jesus' crowd just made: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel." Jesus is the long awaited prophet, he is the long awaited King of Israel, but here we see that Jesus is attracting those who are outside of the nation of Israel.

Literally the world was beginning to come to Jesus. They heard of his teaching, his miracles, his claims, and they

began to desire to see him. Now the expectation of the Jews was that Jesus was going to reestablish the Jewish state and the Davidic Kingdom. So we see the Greek's caution as they approach Jesus' disciples. They go to Philip, from Bethsaida, the northernmost edge of Jesus' ministry, and even Philip is unsure what to do with this desire so he grabs Andrew, and both of them go to see Jesus. But look at what Jesus says to them. **John 12:23-24.**

Jesus wasn't perplexed by the nations coming to him. In fact Jesus identifies the desire of nations as a signal that an hour has come. Because the nations are drawn to Jesus, Jesus knows he must be glorified. He then gives an example of a grain of wheat. If you were to keep a grain of wheat in your pocket, it would eventually spoil and die, and nothing would come of it. But if you drop that grain to the earth, it will die, but it will sprout and produce much fruit.

Jesus knew that his death was going to be the means of expanding his kingdom. The fruit of Jesus was going to be more than one ethnic people, it was going to be the world. In the book of Mark, Jesus rebukes the worship of the temple because it had restricted the Gentiles ability to worship. And look at what he says: **Mark 11:17.**

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem he rode into the center of Jewish thought in order to become the King of the whole world. The uniqueness of Christianity is that there is no race of privilege instead there is a cross of promise. In pointing towards his glorification, Jesus was pointing to his work on the cross where he would open the floodgates of salvation to the whole human race. But it's not the idea of Jesus giving up his life which is hard for us to understand, it is what Jesus says next. **John 12:25-26**

If we return once more to the marketing language of our day, there seems to be no worse campaign than what Jesus just offered. Hate your life and gain it, love it if you want to lose it, become a servant to someone else. But what we really see in this passage is our first point today: **Jesus Makes Sense of Our Longings.**

What do I mean by that? I mean that Jesus just exposed what most of us are already doing. Think for instance on why these Greeks are coming to Jesus. They have either heard, seen or read about who this Jesus claims to be and they are seeking him as some sort of value piece in their life. No one is forcing them to do this, no one taught them to have this desire, but they observe the exact same events the Pharisees did, and they concluded that there was much to gain in Christ.

In responding to Jesus they are responding to something transcendent, something which they hope will make sense of their life. It's something which the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky knows when he says, "**The mystery of the human experience lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.**"

To encounter something transcendent is to encounter something which makes you weigh and assess the scope and substance of your life. It is something which exposes your limits and teases us with the taste of something more. So when I say Jesus makes sense of our longings, I am saying that most of us in here are already doing exactly what Jesus talked about.

There are really only two groups of people we encounter. One is the fatalist or the nihilist who looks at our world and says "God is dead." Therefore there is no structure, no purpose, and no real shot at finding true life. It is this mentality when followed to its fullest which produces wonderfully inspirational quotes like John Stuart Mills word, "**It is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.**" If there is no such thing as a transcendent purpose in life, we are best suited to die honestly than to dream foolishly.

But most of us in here are fools by this standard. And I know this because we live in Montana. Almost daily we come into contact with the transcendent. We encounter beauty and nature which exposes in some a sense of global consciousness, or the vast interconnectedness of the world, or a dimension beyond our understanding. It's what leads men like John Muir to call nature the most grand of all temples, describing it as something which "cleanses and warms like a fire."

Nature might be the most culturally acceptable, but for the most part each and everyone of us pursues

something to the degree that we hope it provides some sort of satisfaction and purpose in our life. And that object, prize, promotion, income bracket or lover becomes the altar on which we willingly sacrifice everything.

We would sacrifice much with minimal hesitation if we thought that any given action would warrant a greater sense of belonging. And while this argument on its own doesn't prove that God exists, it does seem to leave much room for the reality that we were made for something more. And it is this "more" which Jesus is calling us to.

To lose your life for Jesus is to gain your life in eternity. And this is because giving our life over to Jesus is what solves our greatest problem. Look at **John 12:26**. Our greatest need is that we need to find the honor of God the Father. In one sense this innate desire is what keeps at least a baseline of morality in our ever progressive culture. We know that there is someone, something, or some code that we must measure up to. And Jesus has come to give us peace with God.

But why did Jesus have to come as the King? Why couldn't we simply honor God rightly, find peace, live life, and find joy on our own? Jesus goes on: **John 12:27-33**.

Jesus makes sense of our longings, but Jesus also exposes our problem. We often picture Jesus' triumphal entry as the return of Santa Clause. Here comes our happy figure head to make all things right. But did you notice why Jesus came? Did you notice why God audibly spoke that he would indeed glorify Jesus? Look again at **John 12:30-31**. Jesus came as the good king, but he also was coming to bring the justice of the king. The King had come, and we stood in his judgment.

For judgment Jesus came into the world. John opens this very same book in saying, **John 1:9-10** and **John 3:19-20**. Why do we all wrestle with various transcendent desires for affection and belonging? Because we have already rejected the true source of it.

As Jesus prays that God would be glorified in his death, God answers by pointing out the problem: I have glorified it. I have magnified my name. You can see it in the heavens, you can feel it in your heart, you can sense it in art and beauty, but this glory has been rejected. Note the Apostle Paul's explanation of this in **Romans 1:19-23**.

We stand in judgment because since Adam, all our hearts desire to rebel against God not to honor him. But the good news of Easter is that in light of this first glorification, God has promised to glorify his name again. He has promised two things in this glorification: **John 12:30-32**. Not only are we blind to God, but the Bible describes us as being under the power of Satan. But in Easter God promises to raise up his King on the cross so that he might throw out the Devil on his head. Each of us has a two-fold problem, our own hearts are twisted but also there is a real active force which stands opposed to us in this world.

In the same way Jesus had to help the crowds understand the audible voice of God, he also came to expose that we need a greater revelation of God than what he has already given us. What exists is enough to condemn, but Jesus came to be the sign that saves.

This is our second point today: **Jesus Stands Above our Problems**. Yes it is true that Jesus came to judge sin and destroy the works of the Devil. Yes it's true that Jesus came to glorify God, but Jesus has also done this for you. God spoke for your sake, Jesus lived for your sake, and Jesus is going to die for your sake. Jesus saw our problem, and he meets it in excess.

Where we have been raised in Satan's dominion, God will raise higher his King. Where God has revealed his glory though ignored, he will lift up his Son to an even higher glory unavoidable. The good news is even better than the Pharisees mocked. More than the world going after Jesus, Jesus has gone after the world. Jesus is going to answer the problem of the transcendent by fixing himself clearly and loudly at the center of all human history.

Jesus often describes himself as light in a dark world. He is something distinct in the presence of something pervasive and universal. Let's continue reading **John 12:34-36**.

It's important to understand the tension that John is creating here. The crowd began to ask Jesus who this Son of Man is and why he must be lifted up, and Jesus responds with this teaching that while there is light, walk in it. Seek out the light, believe in the light, become "Sons of the light." And then Jesus hides himself.

Why? Why would Jesus call men to follow him as the light, and then hide himself from the people who seemed most apt to respond to him? John continues: **John 12:37-43**.

You see Jesus, God's coming King came. And he was born, he grew up living a sinless life. He went on to be a moral revolutionary, a prolific teacher, he even allowed women into ministerial positions that were taboo even to secular culture, he performed miracles, he gave signs, he healed the sick, he even brought dead men back to life. But people didn't believe. Despite the bright light of Christ, no one had become sons of the light.

Even some of the religious officials found aspects of Jesus' teaching attractive, but they were paralyzed by fear to act on it. Even though the God of the world was going to find deep satisfaction in the glory of Jesus, the hearts of man were so blind that we treasured the glory of man over the glory of Jesus. As the scripture passage said: despite God's son incarnate, people were blinded, hardened, and unable to see rightly who Jesus was.

This is why Jesus hid himself, he was waiting for his hour on the cross. We do not avoid judgment because Jesus was a wonderful teacher. We do not become sons of God because Jesus worked miracles. We do not avoid the power of Satan because Jesus empowered women. The light had come, but it was only on the cross that it would be magnified above all things. The King had come, but his rule would be defined by his willing death for his people. Because only on the cross would Jesus defeat the power of unbelief.

The light of God wasn't reserved for those who bore witness to the historical Jesus, the light of Christ is reserved for those who live in the shadow of the cross. This is you. Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that above all of our problems, above all of our shortcomings, above all of our weaknesses and fears we might see the glory of God and his salvation in the King he provided for us.

An awareness of something more, the sting of morality, the weight of purpose and belonging, all of these things can be realized yet bear no real change. Like the men and women in this scene they might even be directed towards Jesus, but unless you see Jesus death as the moment where the sin of your blinded hearts was both forgiven and freed, you will never know true life.

You can't make sense of your longings, nor can you resolve your problems without Jesus. In Jesus, God has revealed himself. In Jesus the judgment of sin has come, we are either judged as saved by Christ dying in our place, or we die on our own by rejecting again God's glory. In Jesus the ruler of the world was put out because the true King was lifted up.

No one follows Jesus rightly out of a lack of understanding, we follow Jesus because we understand clearly the truth of our own hearts. Some of us know this by the sin which lies secret but active in our hearts, some of us know this by the unending quest to fill a transcendent void. The promise of Easter is that Jesus has come to defeat our sin and fill our lives with himself.

On Palm Sunday the crowds laid down branches for the King, but through the gospel Jesus enables us to freely lay down our lives for the King. To the believers in here I want to hold up this picture of sacrifice along-side the critique of the Pharisees. You have two choices in following Jesus, you either side with the Pharisees and see dramatic life-altering changes as excessive and gaining nothing, or you respond the way Jesus called you to, to see his light, to see his life, and to willingly throw everything at the feet of him who satisfied all things.

The right response to this King is to allow all of our anticipation give way to worship as we see the truth of who he is.

To look at the life of Jesus and think that his work and his calling to lay down your life for him is foolishness, do not be deceived. To unbox Jesus and have anything other than a response in faith and belief is to prove the very problem which Jesus came to solve. To reject Jesus is to also lose your life, but to lose it to eternal punishment.

But praise God the very same event you reject, is also the sufficient power to make you to believe. You cannot avoid responding to Jesus, but Jesus on the cross Jesus has given us the ability to respond as sons of light.

John 1:9-13

Praise God that Jesus has come to be known. Let us worship the King who has come to satisfy our hearts and solve all of our problems. For he has gone after the world, and given them everything.